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Weishampel - The Deicide. 1880.

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**THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
OF NEW YORK**

1918

THE
DEICIDE.



THE DEICIDE.

BY J. F. WEISHAMPEL, JR.

BALTIMORE.
1880.

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FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
1918

THE DEICIDE.

I.

SCENE IN JERUSALEM.

[*Roman Governor's Palace. Pilate within. Enter his wife.*]

Pilate. Thou here, Cornelia!

Cornelia. Yes, my lord, I came
In haste, lest that my messenger should fail.
I know thou lovest me too well to chide.

Pilate. Fair wife, thy message came; I gave it ear
For its sweet sender's sake. But I'm a man
Of facts, not dreams.

Cornelia. Yet thou art sad, my lord,
I read it in thy voice. Thou wouldst be stern
To meet fulfillment of thine office,—aye,
In exigence of insurrection cruel—
But not unjust. Alas, this hour I heard
That harmless seer was scourged again! Is't true?

Pilate. Aye, aye, 'tis true. I thought to get him off
From harder fate. But now I'm worse perplex'd!
Thrice have I questioned him. A visionary!
Claiming descent from God, and prates of Truth
Revealed alone through him. *Truth*—what is Truth?
His kingship is a phantom of the air.
Yet still there chafes without, in fierce array,
A furious mob of these rebellious Jews,
Clamoring for me to immolate that man,
To satisfy their vile priest-ridden souls.
Listen—they shout of Cæsar—dost thou hear?—
He is no friend of Cæsar! Mark the trick!
They would compel me to it!

Cornelia. Be not moved,
 Dear lord, but keep the bigots still at bay,
 For I have had a vision in a dream,
 Which seems to mean, *He is no friend of God*
 Who doth offend this lowly man of grief.
 I saw his form descending from the stars,
 With myriad flying spirits 'round about,
 And his remembered face of lofty love
 Shone with a glory like the radiant sun,
 And from the circling splendors of the sky
 A voice of calm majestic tone came down,
 As if it were an oracle divine,
 And said, *This Man is my beloved Son.*
 O Pilate, let me warn thee once again,
 Have nothing thou to do with that just man. [*Exit.*]

Pilate, [soliloq.] I am in doubt. The rabble shake my
 gates.—

A whisper of sedition to that beast
 At Capræ, he'd banish me to Gaul!
 I know I am not superstitious, still
 The eyes of that strange being pierce me through,
 And if I cannot brook them here on earth,
 How shall I stand before their dread rebuke
 In Hades, when eternal fate is fixed?

[*Scene changes to front of palace opening on forum, occupied by a vast mob of Jews. Pilate, who had previously twice addressed them, and sought the release of Jesus, now appears a third time and takes the judgment-seat. Jesus, who has been scourged and crowned with thorns, is brought forth by a guard.*]

Pilate. Behold your king! The tetrarch has seen fit
 To deck him with the purple and a crown.

Mob. Away with him! away with him! We have
 No king but Cæsar.

Caiaphas. Sir, we urge again
 Our rightful franchise guaranteed by Rome,

Thy sanction of our Sanhedrim's decrees.
We have adjudged this criminal to death
And now demand his punishment.

Pilate. Not so,
I will chastise him; let him then depart.

First Jew. Nay! nay!

Second Jew. He calls himself the Son of God!

Third Jew. He hath reviled our law.

Shimei. Crucify him!

Caiaphas. If thou shouldst set this vile impostor free,
Thou art no friend of Cæsar.

First Jew. We'll appeal!

Caiaphas. He'll send another procurator here
To crush disturbers of Judea's peace.
Thou know'st the emperor's foibles!

Pilate. Silence, priest!

By Mars! I have my foibles, too! I'll make
All Jewry crouch in sackcloth for that threat!
Ye know the man is innocent. Observe,
I sent him to our noble cousin Herod,
And he hath not condemned him, seeing well
Ye hate him only for his heresy.
Therefore I choose to loose him. Let him go
Because of custom at your annual feast.

Caiaphas. Nay, noble sir; that is not all. 'Tis true
Th' Sanhedrim hath condemn'd his impious faith,
But this pretender rates himself a king,
Claiming Judea as his heritage,
And aping royalty on the highway, cheered
By superstitious rabble as he rides.
Indeed I dare not vouch for longer peace
Among our restless people, if thou fail
To crush this superseder of our laws.
Why halt so long with such unusual scruples?—
The man is mean—a Nazarite by fame—
His followers are but bondmen, fishermen,
All simple folk of no repute or power,—

Thou need'st not hesitate with such. Pronounce
Thy fiat; win the goodwill of my race;—
Give judgment unto death upon this knave.

Shimei. He and his followers throng'd our temple way,
And drove us out who bartered there in doves,
Scattering our shekels and our lawful trade
With harsh invective and a whip of cords.
I have much monies from my traffic there
In heifers, rams and lambs for sacrifice,
Yet half my fortune would I loan the state
If Pilate sent this troubler to the cross,
And freed Barabbas.

Pilate. Him!—that bandit chief?

Shimei. The same.

First Jew. Give us Barabbas.

Caiaphas. Not a Jew

But would prefer the substitute we name.

Pilate. Yet listen, priest! I've watched this meek-
voiced man

For years, and find him faultless of a crime
Deserving death.

Mob. The cross! the cross! the cross!

Caiaphas. Beware, sir, lest this tumult reach the ears
Of Cæsar! Should Tiberius smell the words,
King of the Jews, no fawning would remove
His jealousy.

Shimei. To Cæsar we'll appeal!

Mob. Appeal to Cæsar!

Pilate. Hold! Should I consent—

[*Enter Pilate's wife.*]

Cornelia. Thou art no friend of God! Now match the
phrase,

And weigh it well, my lord. Beware this crime!
'Tis better thou be not Cæsar's pandering friend,
Through such base act of moral cowardice,
Than act the catpaw of these cruel Jews,

Forever after haunted by remorse—

For I believe that Jesus is the Christ!

Pilate. Ho, servant, fetch me urn of water here,
I will be innocent of this man's blood.

Mob. On our heads his blood! Our children's, too!

Pilate. Thus do I wash my hands clean of the guilt
That your most pestilent race would have me share.

[*Washes.*]

Now, all depart. Centurion, guard the man

From their indecent fury. He is brave;

He'll meet death like a Roman; but be quick,

Nor magnify his pain. [*Jesus is taken out.*]

Mob. Away with him!

Cornelia. God help thee, Christ!—and husband, God
help thee! [*Exit.*]

Pilate, [sol.] Now from thy haughty seat, O Pilate, down!
What joys have men who hang on tyrants' love?

Fear and remorse already eat thy heart!

Down, down, and hasten, lest the Nazarene's eyes

Transfix thy soul again before he dies! [*Exit.*]

II.

A STREET IN JERUSALEM.

[*Enter several disciples.*]

Cleopas. I charge you, now, my brethren, bear in mind
What ye observe this day, all sights and deeds—

And write them down on your phylacteries,

That our dear friends of other towns may read

How suffereth Jesus. O! were I the sun,

My dazzling splendor should become as night!

Were I a star, I'd hurl myself aslant

And drop upon this crime-ensanguined earth,

A dread avenger, shattering all its life!

John. Be not so harsh, but, like the Lord, forgive.

'Tis hard to smother passion, but *He* said
Bless them, that curse you!

Cleopas. True, but I'm in grief.
And on my way to view my Master's death.
The populace is crowding through the gates.
O look! behold yon struggling multitude
Now surging hither! ah! here is Shimei!

[*Enter Shimei.*]

Shimei. Ye fools! ye dogs! well met! now greet your
king!

He trudges footsore with that scowling throng;
His purple robe is trailing in the dust;
The chaplet on his brow is wove of thorns!—
Ye did not reck this, when the temple courts
Resounded with hosannas, and your *God*
Railed out upon the money-changers there! [*Exit.*]

Matthew. O Christ! endue us with thy patient grace!

John. He cometh near; my heart doth pant with pain!

James. How meek his bearing! what a sad, sad face!

John. I wish he'd turn this way.

Cleopas. Note that bloody brow!

- I would his Godhead would discharge itself,
And damn the host that crushes him about!
I cannot hold my fury. Halt! ye gang
Of murderers! and set Messiah free!

John. O curb thy zeal my brother, else the guard
Might deem thy speech a treason. See! the Lord
Has cast his pitying glance at us,—it seems
Beseeching—O, what loving eyes!—I come—
I come, dear Lord, with thee!

Matthew. We follow, too.

ONE HOUR LATER.

[*Enter two Soldiers.*]

First Soldier. Hark—Comrade!

Second Soldier. Ho!

First Soldier. Heard'st thou that noise?

Second Soldier. I heard.

First Soldier. That was a thunderbolt.

Second Soldier. Methinks it was.

First Soldier. But still I see no token in the sky,
Hark! now again! that was a sterner sound
Than any thunder that e'er shook the air—
Some wonder's working—why these portents else?
At early dawn to-day I saw a ball
Of bright red lustre shoot athwart the sky,
And when it passed beyond the western walls
It cracked to pieces o'er Mount Calvary.

Second Soldier. I fear me, for I also saw such sights.

[*Earthquake and sudden darkness.*]

First Soldier. My comrade, run!

Second Soldier. An earthquake!

First Soldier. Haste with me!

Second Soldier. How dark it is! Ho, citizens! alarm!

[*Exeunt.*]

[*Enter Cleopas, running.*]

Cleopas. O quake thou, now, Jerusalem, and sink,
Forever shamed before the startled world!
Messiah hangs on the accursed stake,
The noblest, purest, godliest form of man
E'er butchered by thy prophet-stoning mobs! [Exit.]

[*Enter two Citizens.*]

Jewish Citizen. 'Tis wonderful!

Roman Citizen. He surely is the Christ!

Jewish Citizen. I doubt no more. Dost thou know
Shimei?

Roman Citizen. I think I do.

Jewish Citizen. Well, he is strangely set.
On yonder point he joined the multitude,
And forced himself before the prisoner's face—
Why there he is—

Roman Citizen. Is that the man?

Jewish Citizen. It is;

But mark his hair, how grey it hath become—
How changed his voice—

[*Shimei passes.*]

Shimei. O woe! woe! woe to me!—

Roman Citizen. Let's turn away—he hath gone mad.

Jewish Citizen. He rushed

As if in frenzy on the Nazarene,
And smote him to the ground; and when he fell
Most ignominiously upon him spat,
And cried out jeeringly with much contempt:
If thou be Christ of God, now save thyself!
When Jesus rose upon his staggering feet,
He looked upon the Jew with steady gaze
Of mingled pity and reproach, yet spoke
No word. The guard, vexed at delay, closed ranks.
But Shimei's choler sudden changed to fear;
He backward reeled, flung up his brawny arms
Then sprang away in fear, with rapid strides,
Face blanched, hair bleached, and eyes engorged with
blood.

Thus doth he range the street, with cries of woe;
That Jesus is Messiah now I know.

III.

NIGHT. DAMASCUS GATE.

[*Enter Disciples and strangers.*]

*Cleopas.** The Lord is dead.

James. But he will rise again.

Cleopas. You do believe it then?

James. It will be so.

Ere twice yon moon its nightly race doth run,
He will be risen, disenthralled from death.

Cleopas. Then hail him true Messiah—Christ supreme!

James. Didst thou behold the sacrifice?

* See Luke xxiv: 18, and John xix: 25.

Cleopas. I did ;
I followed closely as the guards allowed,
And could not tear away till all was past ;
And to these curious strangers, just arrived,
I will depict what my unwilling eyes
Beheld betwixt their fitful mists of grief.
—Ye know the gentle Jesus, friends, who healed
The sick and sore, and gave the blind their sight—
Far-famed for calling Lazarus from the tomb—
Who cured the Gadarene demoniacs—
Who trod Judea meekly day by day,
To teach the wretched poor that God is love ?

Stranger. We know him well, and tremble for his fate,
Lest the unrighteous synagogues prevail,
And have him put to death.

Cleopas. No longer fear,
But weep—for he is slain !

Stranger. Already slain ?
Alas ! we hoped the procurator's will
Was set against it, for we heard his wife
Came late from Cæsarea, to beseech
His safety.

Cleopas. 'Twas in vain ; for Pilate's will
Is weaker than his fears. 'Tis true, at first
He shrunk from the injustice and declared
Our Master innocent. But Cæsar's name
Howled out with threat'nings by the raging Jews
Scattered his tender thoughts, (infirm at best,)
And wrung from him a coward-like consent
To let them have their way.

Stranger. They stoned Christ, then ?

Cleopas. They crucified him !

Stranger. Crucified their Lord !
A thief's death and a murderer's ? O rank shame !
No marvel the heavens grew black and Salem seemed
To sway as we approached.

Cleopas. 'Twas ominous, indeed !
Scarce had the procurator set his seal
To this eternal obloquy, before
The rabble horde, led on by Pharisees
Of vaunted standing in the synagogues—
Even the high priest Caiaphas and his train—
(All mingled wrangling with the Roman guards)—
Dragg'd the meek prisoner down the narrow streets
To haste the execution, lest remorse
Should start the moody Pilate to retract.
O how my heart did beat my rushing blood,
When I beheld the ponderous stake he bore !
He stooped beneath its weight and oftentimes fell
Prone in the dust, until the guards compelled
Some Libyan to relieve him.

Stranger. Prithee, friend,
Did no one pity him ?

Cleopas. Yes, many a man
Clung to the crowd, and with indignant flush
His pity spent in protest muttered deep.
And from the gaping doorways women screamed
And, coaxed along through curious tenderness,
Mixt in the rout, bewailing for his fate.
But up on Acra's slope he turned and said :
*Ye daughters of Jerusalem, weep not
For me, but for yourselves and suckling ones—
Your hour of desolation is not far,
When like in shambles shall your children's blood
Drip on the ruins of these walls and towers !*

Stranger. A fearful prophecy!—was it in wrath ?

Cleopas. Nay—had you seen his eyes and heard his voice
Far-reaching with compassion through the years !

Strangers. The story melts us.

Cleopas. He was ever thus,
Lit up benignly like a sacrifice
For universal sin. Jehovah's love,
If ever here incarnate, burned in him.

Strangers. Thus have we thought of Christ, e'er since
he healed

The paralytic at Capernaum.

But finish with the tragedy.

Cleopas. I will.

It is not far to Calvary, strewn with skulls
Of malefactors bleached upon the cross.
And thither our Lord was borne. Two robbers stood,
Already waiting for their own just fate,
And leered upon him. This companionship
Was planned by Caiaphas, to defraud the Lord
Of good repute. But O! how can I tell
You all? For when the soldiers stretched him down
Upon the stake to nail his hands and feet,
A spectral silence awed the gaping throng,
And there was quiet like the hush in storms,
Until the hammer fell. Then throbb'd all hearts,
And shrieks of agony rose from many a group.
Then suddenly I swooned, with pity blind,
With fury choked; and only waked to see
The Lord Messiah hung between the thieves.
Then clamored the mob, suborned to drown his fame,
Reviling his pretensions; but a cloud
Of angry blackness came about the sun
And stupified them all with nameless dread.
Then shudder'd the earth, and rocks in Hinnom split;
The air grew pregnant with portent, and then
The vast outgathering, Jews and Romans, Greeks
And wondering strangers, wrought with sudden fear,
Broke from the sight, smiting their brows and breasts,
And crying, ALAS!—THIS IS THE SON OF GOD!

*

*

*

[*Enter Shimei, hastily.*]

Shimei. O holy prophets!—intercede for me!
O father Abraham!—I am accurst!

Stranger. Who is that moaning one?

Cleopas. A wealthy Jew,
Who smote the Lord upon his way to death,
But fell himself, bereft; condemned, some say,
To tread the earth until the Judgment Day.

[*Shimei passes out the gate.*]

Shimei. O take thy royal gaze from me, thou Christ!
And let me die! Farewell, Jerusalem!—
Far from thy clime a wretch accurst I go,
A type through time of Israel's sin and woe.

NOTES.

"A whisper of sedition to that beast
At Capreæ, he'd banish me to Gaul."

The Emperor Tiberius spent the later years of his life at Capreæ, in Campania, indulging in unlimited caprice, cruelty and sensuality. Seneca declared that he was perpetually intoxicated. Pilate's apprehensions were well founded, for Tiberius banished him to the interior of Gaul, A. D. 36. It is related that shortly afterward Pilate hanged himself, whether from disappointment or remorse is not known. The similarity of the legend to that of Judas Iscariot affords a sort of poetical justice.

"It is not far to Calvary, strewn with skulls
Of malefactors bleached upon the cross."

There has been much perplexity in fixing the site of Calvary, which was *without* the walls of ancient Jerusalem. The church of the Holy Sepulchre is erected far *within* the walls of the modern city upon a spot once occupied by a heathen temple. Good authorities do not accept this as evidence. While some place Calvary on Mount Acra, others give the title to a separate hill to the west of Acra. The presumption is that the place was commonly used for the execution of criminals.

"Upon the stake."

The *crux* of the Romans was a stake of sufficient length and was not formed of crossed beams as usually pictured. The latter representation of the mode of the Saviour's death was introduced into painting and sculpture several hundred years after the event.

—"condemned, *some say*,
To tread the earth until the Judgment Day."

There are many popular legends of a "wandering Jew," intended to illustrate the vengeance of Christ, but all are probably founded on John xxi: 22, 23, and seem to be inconsistent with his character. The person of Shimei introduced in this poem is simply supposititious and carries no other curse with him than that of a guilty conscience, which rumor magnifies.



